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Statement of Mike Mansfield

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)
August 10, 1957

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Mr. President:

In this morning's issue of the Washington Post and Times Herald there appears a well merited editorial on the leadership and statesmanship of our Majority Leader, the senior Senator from Texas [Mr. Johnson], on the Civil Rights bill. There are those who want no Civil Rights bill whatever; there are those who want a Civil Rights bill that will encompass the whole spectrum and would be prepared, if need be, to use force. There are those in the middle who do not adhere to the extreme views but are interested in a Civil Rights voting bill which will guarantee to all our citizens, regardless of race, creed, color or nationality, the right to vote. Such a bill has been requested by the President over the past three years. May I say most respectfully that he now has in the version passed by the Senate the kind of a bill which he advocated, and it is a stronger, better and more workable bill than the one which passed the other Body.

Future historians will view with impartiality the leadership exemplified in the person of the senior Senator from Texas in this debate. Future historians will appreciate the great contribution he has made to democratic processes, and future historians in the years to come will be able to assess more accurately the significance of the five weeks' debate on the Civil Rights measure in the Senate in the summer of 1957.

I think it is ~~well~~ well to point out that on last Wednesday for the first time five southern Senators from the States of Tennessee, Texas and

Florida voted for a Civil Rights bill. ^PI should like to point out that in other fields of civil rights, outside the voting right, the courts of this country are laying down decisions, and the people are making progress.

I should like to point out that this bill provides for the appointment of an assistant Attorney General to specialize in civil rights cases.

I should like to point out that a commission to be created under this bill -- a six-member Civil Rights Commission to investigate cases and study the need for any further legislation -- will be set up. The life of this commission would be limited to two years but it would have subpoena power to bring in witnesses either for open or closed hearings.

I should like to point out that the hidden meanings, the simple citations, the many pitfalls which were in the bill as it passed the House, have been uncovered, corrected and laid out in the open for all to see because of the drawn-out debate in the Senate.

I should like to ^{emphasize} ~~point out~~ that contrary to all expectations, there has been no filibuster and that the right of unlimited debate has been maintained.

I would like to point out that the Senate bill is a good bill, a stronger bill and a better bill because of the corrections and the additions made in this Body.

I should like to point out that trial by jury has been extended to all criminal contempt cases. In my opinion, jury trial should be provided in every case in which a citizen, a corporation or a labor union is to be

punished if found guilty of criminal contempt. The Senate, by emphasizing it the right of trial by jury has broadened and made it more secure in the annals of American jurisprudence. This is as it should be.

May I repeat again that the President has indicated ~~at~~ over a period of time that he wanted a Civil Rights voting bill. May I again say most respectfully that he now has in the bill passed by the Senate the kind of a bill he wanted and the kind of a bill which, in my opinion, he could sign with gratification and appreciation.

Mr. President, the editorial referred to gives a fair, understandable and meaningful analysis of the part played by the distinguished Majority Leader. The senior Senator from Texas has consistently stated that there would in his opinion be a Civil Rights bill this year. The Senator from Texas has consistently worked toward that end. The Senator from Texas has been successful in bringing about majority agreement on a bill which will meet ~~the~~ ^{with} approbation, in my opinion, in all parts of the country.

In his speech of last Wednesday he laid down a line of thought which in my opinion it would do us well to read, re-read and read again. If I may quote one portion from that magnificent speech which to me is more significant than the rest, I would repeat the following words of the Majority Leader:

"Nothing lasting, nothing enduring has ever been born from hatred and prejudice -- except more hatred and more prejudice . . . there is a compelling need for a solution that will enable all Americans to live in dignity and unity. . . "

Mr. President, these are words to remember. These are words which have been measured by performance. These are words which establish the senior Senator from Texas as a national figure, as a man of discerning judgment, and as an individual who has the real and vital interests of his country at heart.

The Senate can be proud of the Civil Rights bill it passed and the country can be grateful that under the leadership of the distinguished Majority Leader, the Civil Rights legislation was threshed out in the open and the final results achieved in the field of open discussion and full publicity.